



# IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & WELFARE

## Bureau of Community and Environmental Health

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### **Summary of Public Health Assessment for Stibnite/Yellow Pine Mining Area**

#### **What has happened at the site?**

The Stibnite Mine Area (Stibnite) was actively mined from the early 1900's until the late 1990's. Past mining activities deposited metals, waste rock, and mine tailings over nearly fifty percent of the 3,000 acre site. Stibnite was proposed to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's National Priority List on September 13, 2001. The Bureau of Community and Environmental Health (BCEH) under a cooperative agreement with the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry prepared a public health assessment to address mining-related contamination found at the site. BCEH used available environmental data to assess the potential public health impacts of exposure to site contaminants.

#### **What kind of contamination was found?**

Elevated levels of heavy metals produced by mining activities and ore processing were found in site soils, sediment, surface water, and groundwater.

Arsenic and antimony are the main contaminants of concern throughout the site. Lead, mercury, and manganese were also detected in smaller, more heavily contaminated spots on the site. A former mill building on the site also contains cyanide and carbon canisters containing various metals.

#### **How might I be exposed to site contaminants?**

People recreating at Stibnite could come into contact with (be exposed to) contaminated soils and surface water. Hunting, fishing, operating motor vehicles, disturbing site soils, camping, swimming, or drinking surface water at Stibnite could result in exposure to site contaminants.

#### **Can I become sick if I am exposed to contaminants found at Stibnite?**

If you are not exposed to a contaminant, it can not harm your health. If you avoid the site, you will not be exposed to site contaminants. If you recreate at the site, you could be exposed to site contaminants. However, after reviewing available data, BCEH concluded that exposure to site contaminants is unlikely to result in any adverse health effects for the general public due to their limited contact with the site. This conclusion was made based on the assumption that site visitors would have limited contact with site contaminants over a limited period of time.

BCEH's conclusion that the site poses no apparent public health hazard is based on current land use. If land use changes, this conclusion might not be valid. BCEH does not have any information about the levels of contaminants in site plants and game animals. Therefore, it is unknown if eating plants or animals found on the site could cause adverse health effects. Also, BCEH does not have any information about past exposures of former mine workers and Stibnite town site residents.

#### **What are BCEH's recommendations?**

BCEH, a non-regulatory public health agency, developed recommendations to reduce potential exposures to site-related contaminants. The recommendations are as follows:

- As a precaution, obvious no trespassing signs should be posted to restrict site access.

- BCEH should provide health education materials to those that live around and recreate at the site.
- Site workers should limit contact with surface soil and surface water.
- Even though exposure to site contaminants is not likely to cause adverse health effects, it would be prudent to remediate areas with the highest levels of contaminants.
- Plants and animals found on the site should be collected and analyzed for potential uptake of metals from the site soils and surface water.

## **What actions are planned for the future?**

The following is a list of actions planned by BCEH and the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality (IDEQ):

- BCEH will conduct health education activities to inform Yellow Pine residents about the status of the site.
- BCEH will recommend that residents and recreationists avoid recreating at the site as a precaution against exposure to site contamination.
- BCEH will assist the U. S. Forest Service and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency with their community involvement plan as necessary.
- BCEH will review additional environmental sampling data as it becomes available.
- IDEQ is negotiating institutional controls with the current site owners to prevent future development of the site.
- IDEQ is negotiating with the site owners about how to prevent public exposure to site contamination. Prevention strategies include access restriction, posting warning signs, and site reclamation. Reclamation activities will focus on preventing public exposure to tailings piles and other contamination.
- IDEQ will require that the mill building be removed and properly disposed of along with the chemicals and equipment currently stored inside.
- IDEQ will arrange to have damaged buildings on the site removed if they interfere with site clean up activities, or if they pose a significant threat to site safety.

## **How can I get a copy of the public health assessment (PHA)?**

Concerned citizens are encouraged to obtain a copy of the public health assessment for more in-depth information and to provide their written comments. To obtain a copy of this public health assessment or for information about BCEH, hazardous wastes, and toxic substances, contact:

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